

METHOD OF PLAYING A GAME

FIELD OF INVENTION

- [01] The invention relates to a method of playing a game having certain rules similar to those of regulation baseball but with modifications designed to suit a wider range of age, gender and ability than regulation baseball.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

- [02] Regulation baseball, also commonly known as "hardball" (including both American Major League and Little League Baseball, and other leagues around the world), is a highly competitive sport demanding high levels of skill, and is tailored to suit only a narrow range of players. In particular, curveball pitches and other pitch variations such as changeups, split fingered pitches, sliders, screwballs and knuckleballs, that are allowed in regulation baseball, add significantly to the difficulty level of the game. Further, regulation baseball can be a dangerous sport as a result of batters being struck by deceptive pitches such as curveballs, runners colliding with other players, and the nature of the ball's hardcore structure.
- [03] The game of baseball in America has been experiencing a declining interest among youth. A lack of fun and enjoyment seems to be a contributing factor. High levels of competitive pressure are put on players. As a result, the large majority of youth players who start playing in youth baseball leagues at early ages quit by the time they reach adolescence. A study conducted in 1988 by Michigan State University revealed that "children are quitting youth sports in droves". According to the results, one half of them will drop out by age 12, and three fourths by age 15. The largest single age dropout comes at 14, about the time children encounter larger fields and pitchers who can throw curveballs. A 1996 study shows that youth baseball ranks third behind basketball and soccer in participation.
- [04] Analysis of the decline of interest in the game of baseball may be found in, for example, Collegiate Sports, *Disturbing Trends in Baseball*, March 1998, Lou Pavlovich, Jr., Editor, Collegiate Baseball; St. Petersburg Times, *Baseball's decline is traced to youngsters*, Apr. 6, 2003, Hubert Mizell, Times Sports Columnist; USA

Today, *What's The Problem With Baseball?*, June, 2003, P t r Barzilai and John Follaco; Baseball Play America, *Special Report: Ways to Fix the Game of Baseball*, Vol. 4, Issue 12, July, Aug., Sep., 2003, Don Weiskopf; Baseball Play America, *Kids First in Sports – A Blueprint for Change*, Vol. 4, Issue 12, July, Aug., Sep., 2003, Regis Tremblay, Founder, The Center for Kids First in Sports; Baseball Play America, *Renaissance Needed in Youth Baseball*, Vol. 4, Issue 12, July, Aug., Sep., 2003, Don Weiskopf, Publisher, Baseball Play America; among others.

[05] Other games have been modeled after regulation baseball in an effort to simplify the game to be more enjoyable for players of lower skill levels. These games sometimes employ a larger ball and larger bat to make hitting the ball easier; a softer ball which reduces injuries from inaccurate throws or catches; or different rules to make playing and scoring easier. An example is softball, which was introduced as an alternative to baseball. Many players leave the game of baseball to play softball, which requires a lower level of skill and is safer than regulation baseball. Softball is played with a larger ball of different weight and softer core that is easier to hit but harder to handle and throw than the ball used in regulation baseball. As a result of the nature of the ball, the speed of softball pitches is also much slower and the hits much shorter than what is found in regulation baseball. As such, softball can be a significantly different, less challenging and less exciting sport than regulation baseball.

[06] Other variations of regulation baseball have been developed, such as those disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,106,416 to Ward (sponge ball game); U.S. Pat. No. 6,179,734 to Bravard (teeball game for young children); U.S. Pat. No. 4,037,837 to Bauer (ball game system wherein different sexes, age group or classes of players can play on the same field having differing areas of play); U.S. Pat. No. 3,024,024 to Chalcroft and U.S. Pat. No. 3,948,521 to Warren (ball games adapted for play in limited available space); U.S. Pat. No. 4,781,385 to Harley and U.S. Pat. No. 4,973,061 to Catherall (apparatus for indoor ball game); U.S. Pat. No. 1,120,076 to Noonan, U.S. Pat. No. 1,911,569 to Hinckley, and U.S. Pat. No. 5,562,289 to McAllister (varying ball games containing elements of baseball). However, the noted references disclose ball games that lack a certain level of challenge and excitement,

are suited primarily for young children, require approximately the same skill level as that of regulation baseball, or are of such a completely different nature that they incorporate few if any of the aspects and rules of regulation baseball.

- [07] As such, there remains a need for a new game that would appeal to both young and adult players, and allow for a wider range of skill levels while still providing a significant challenge to its players.

Summary of the Invention

- [08] In view of the foregoing, an object of the present invention is to provide a variation of regulation baseball that incorporates substantially the same aspects and rules of regulation baseball, and gives the players the excitement and feel of regulation baseball without the same level of difficulty of play, and in particular without the same high skill level required in batting and pitching as in regulation baseball. A further object of the invention is to take the element of fear and/or embarrassment of the players out of the game. In the game of the present invention, pitches are limited to fastballs. Curveballs and other non-fastball pitches are ruled as automatic balls. Pitchers may only throw and batters need only hit fastball pitches, as opposed to more difficult curveball pitches and other more difficult non-fastball pitches. The instant game is designed to provide players with less opportunity for failure and be less intimidating than regulation baseball as a result of the limitation of pitches to only fastballs. The game is also intended to provide more challenge and excitement, and to require more skill than other games such as softball. The game of the present invention will thus be suitable for a wider range of skill levels, and will attract more youths and adults to return to playing in organized leagues that they would have otherwise not played in because of the lack of challenge in softball, or because of the pressure, competition and much higher level of skill in batting and pitching that is demanded in traditional regulation baseball.

- [09] The game of the present invention optionally provides a ball that closely resembles the ball used in traditional regulation baseball in size, shape, feel and weight. As a result, the game may give players a traditional baseball-like feel (i.e. as a result of the ball used), as opposed to the game of softball which gives players a different feel as a result of its larger ball.

[10] It is a further object of the present invention to provide a game that provides more participation by the players and is more exciting and higher scoring than regulation baseball. The game of the instant invention allows for only fastball pitches, and as a result, it is expected that the batters will have more hits and score more runs. In addition, there will consequently be more balls put in play and more fielding required by the players on the field.

[11] It is another object of the present invention to provide a game that is faster-paced and that can be played in a shorter amount of time than regulation baseball, so as to encourage participation by recreational players. The pitcher is encouraged to deliver pitches without delay and the batter is encouraged to remain in the batter's box between pitches. In a specific embodiment a strike-out is issued after 2 strikes and a walk is issued after 3 balls. In addition, the game ends after a predetermined number of innings that is less than 9 innings; after a predetermined length of time; or after the completion of the maximum number of innings within a predetermined length of time, whichever occurs first.

[12] It is still another object of the present invention to provide a game that is safer and less intimidating to players than regulation baseball. The instant invention provides rules for optional tagging, allows only non-curving fastball pitches, provides a ball with a softer core than what is used in regulation baseball, a safety first base, wooden bats and helmets, and disallows metal spikes. As a result, it is expected that there be less collisions between runners and players on the field, as well as fewer injuries resulting from being struck by the ball.

[13] It is yet another object of the present invention to provide a game that is tailored to the players' age, gender and ability. In specific embodiments of the invention, divisions are organized depending on the velocity of the pitches, age, skill level and/or gender of the players. Thus players can play within a division that better suits their level of skill and reaction time, and as a result, it is expected that the game will be more fun and safer with fewer injuries to the players.

[14] While the present invention will be described in detail with reference to certain embodiments, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to such detail as set forth in the description or drawings. The present invention is

capable of being practiced in various ways and it is intended to cover all alternatives, modifications and equivalents which fall within the sphere and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [15] The features of the present invention believed to be novel are set forth with particularity in the appended claims. The invention itself, both as to its organization and methodology, together with further objects and advantages thereof, may best be understood by reference to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:
- [16] FIG. 1 is the top view of a playing field used in the present invention
- [17] FIG. 2 is a ball used in the present invention

DEFINITIONS

- [18] The following terms are intended to have the following general meanings as they are used herein:
- [19] Regulation baseball (or "baseball") – a game between two teams of nine players each, played in accordance with the Official Baseball Rules of Major League Baseball. Regulation baseball is also known as hardball.
- [20] Ball – a pitch which does not enter the strike zone in flight and is not struck by the batter; or a pitch that touches the ground and bounces through the strike zone, is a ball. In an embodiment of the present invention, a pitch that is not a fastball, regardless of whether it enters the strike zone in flight, is also a ball.
(Distinguish from the "ball" described below).
- [21] Ball – a spherical object thrown by the pitcher and struck at by the batter.
- [22] Walk – the awarding of first base to the batter. In the present invention, a walk may be issued when three balls are issued on a batter.
- [23] Pitch – the delivery of a ball to the batter by the pitcher
- [24] Fastball – a pitch delivered in a generally straight manner that does not curve unexpectedly in its approach to the batter.
- [25] Curveball – a pitch delivered with a spin that curves in its approach to the batter.

- [26] **Illegal Pitch** – (i) a pitch that is not a fastball pitch; (ii) a pitch delivered to the batter when the pitcher does not have his pivot foot in contact with the “rubber” in the pitcher’s mound, or (iii) a quick return pitch made with intent to catch the batter off balance.
- [27] **Illegal** – contrary to these rules
- [28] **Team** – a grouping of players
- [29] **Division** – a grouping of teams formed according to a particular characteristic of the game (e.g. pitching velocity) and/or a particular characteristic of the players (e.g., age and/or gender of players).
- [30] **League** – a grouping of divisions wherein the instant game is played
- [31] **Strike** – a proper fastball pitch when so called by the umpire, which (i) is struck at by the batter and is missed; (ii) is not struck at, and any part of the ball passes through any part of the strike zone; or (iii) is fouled by the batter when he has no strikes issued.
- [32] **Strike-out** – an out issued against the batter when two strikes are issued.
- [33] **Strike-zone** – the area of space over home plate within which a strike is issued on fastball pitches that enter through it. The strike-zone is optionally the area of space over home plate from the bottom of the batter’s kneecaps to directly below the batter’s armpits.
- [34] **Batter** – an offensive player who takes a position in the batter’s box
- [35] **Batter’s Box** – the area within which the batter stands during his/her time at bat.
- [36] **Batting lineup** – a list of batters in the order in which they will bat.
- [37] **A/B Batting Position** – a position in the batting lineup where one player is designated as the “A” batter and another player designated as the “B” batter. During the first time through the batting lineup, the “A” batter would be up at bat, and the second time through the batting lineup, the “B” batter would be up at bat. The “A” and “B” batters continue to alternate throughout the game.
- [38] **Runner** – an offensive player who is advancing toward or touching or returning to any base.
- [39] **Fielder** – any defensive player on the playing field.
- [40] **Pitcher** – the player designated to deliver the pitch to the batter.

- [41] Catcher – the player designated to catch the pitch delivered by the pitcher to the batter
- [42] Base – one of four points (i.e. first base, second base, third base and home plate) which must be touched by a runner in order to score a run.
- [43] Fair Ball – a batted ball that settles on fair territory between home plate and first base, or between home plate and third base, or that is in or over fair territory when bounding to the outfield past first base or third base, or that touches first base, second base or third base, or that first falls in fair territory on or beyond first base or third base, or that, while in or over fair territory, touches the person of an umpire or player, or that, while over fair territory, passes out of the playing field in flight.
- [44] Run – the score made by an offensive player who advances from batter to runner and touches first base, second base, third base and home plate in that order.
- [45] Out – one of the three required retirements of offensive players during a team's time at bat.
- [46] Issuing – synonymous with "recording" (e.g. issuing a strike to the batter).
- [47] Fielding Play – the actions of a fielder when attempting to catch and/or throw a ball in play.
- [48] Tag – the action of a fielder in touching a runner with the ball or with his/her glove holding the ball.
- [49] Non-tagging fielding play – a fielding play where tagging of the runner is optional.
- [50] Stealing – the act of a runner advancing to the next base without being advanced thereto by the actions of the batter.
- [51] Leading – the act of a runner moving to a location along the baseline towards the next base and away from the base that the runner is positioned at, such that the runner is not touching the said base
- [52] Penalty – a disadvantage imposed on the player or team for breaking a rule.
- [53] Fair territory – the part of the playing field including the base lines and foul lines from home plate to the bottom of the playing field fence and perpendicularly upwards.
- [54] Foul territory – the part of the playing field outside of fair territory and outside the foul lines extended to the fence and perpendicularly upwards.

- [55] Foul lines – the boundary lines of the playing field separating foul territory from fair territory. (Coincides with the first and third base lines.)
- [56] Inning – the portion of the game within which the teams alternate on offense and defense and in which there are three outs allowed for each team when on offense. Each team's time at bat is a half-inning.
- [57] Pitching Distance – distance between the pitcher's mound and home plate.
- [58] Fence Distance – distance between the outfield fence and home plate.
- [59] Base Distance – distance between a base and the subsequent base.
- [60] Reduced injury factor ball – a ball with a core that is softer than the core of a regulation baseball ball, such that injury resulting from being struck by the ball is reduced.
- [61] Glove radar velocity sensor – a velocity sensor attached to a glove that uses radar to measure the speed of a pitch before it is caught.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

- [62] The present invention relates to a new game involving aspects and rules similar to regulation baseball but with modifications designed to suit a wider range of age, gender and ability. The game of the present invention is played on a playing field 10 shown generally in FIG. 1, which includes a first base 12, a second base 18, a third base 20 and a home plate 22. As in regulation baseball, the objective of each team is to win by scoring more runs than the other team. Runs are scored by offensive players who advance from batter to runner and touch first base 12, second base 18, third base 20 and home plate 22, in that order. An offensive player advances from batter to runner when he/she strikes a pitched ball 60 with a bat into fair territory, or receives a walk. The batter of the offensive team has as his/her objective to reach base safely or advance a runner, either by hitting a fair ball, or receiving a walk. A runner has as his/her objective to advance to home plate 22 and score a run. The pitcher has as his/her objective to strike-out or otherwise put out the batter. The defensive players on the playing field 10 have as their objective to field any balls 60 thrown or hit in their direction in order to prevent runners from advancing or to put out a batter or runner of the offensive team. The offensive team's players take positions

at bat in the batter's box 30 one at a time according to the order of their batting lineup. The defensive team's players take the following positions on the playing field 10: pitcher/mound 40, catcher 24, shortstop 26, first base 12, second base 18, third base 20, center field 56, right field 58, and left field 54. The two opposing teams switch positions each inning as the defensive team and as the offensive team when the offensive team is retired from its time at bat upon the issuing of three outs. Regulation baseball rules, other than the rules disclosed herein, may be included in the game of the present invention. The primary object of the present invention is to provide a new game, as distinguished by its limitation of allowing only fastball pitches, that will suit a wider range of age, gender and ability than regulation baseball or other variations of regulation baseball like softball.

Pitching

[63] Rules are provided that make pitching and batting easier by limiting the pitches to fastballs. Fastball pitches are delivered in a generally straight manner without any unexpected curving in their approach to the batter (other than minimal downward movement of the ball 60 due to gravity). All curveballs and other non-fastball pitches are illegal pitches. The umpire may have discretion in determining whether a pitch is a legal fastball pitch or not. A penalty is issued when the pitcher delivers a pitch that is not a fastball, regardless of whether the pitch is within the strike zone. A possible penalty is to issue a ball to the batter when the pitcher delivers a pitch other than a fastball. In addition, a penalty is issued when the pitcher delivers curveballs or non-fastball pitches on a plurality of occasions throughout the game. A possible number of such occasions is three. A possible penalty is to eject the pitcher from the game. Other possible penalties include issuing a warning to the pitcher, a suspension of the pitcher from playing for a period of time during the game, or awarding an automatic walk or run for the other team. This is advantageous in that it widens the suitability of the game to varying skill levels because the limitation of the pitches to fastballs allows for a greater chance of the batter hitting the ball 60.

[64] The present invention also includes rules that lend to the game a faster pace and allow the game to be played in a shorter time frame than regulation baseball.

Strike-Outs and Walks

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[65] In specific embodiments of the present invention, a strike-out is issued to the batter when two strikes are issued; and a walk is issued to the batter when three balls are issued.

Penalty for Delays

[66] The rules of the instant game also encourage the players to play the game without undue delay. In specific embodiments of the present invention, a penalty is issued when the pitcher fails to deliver a pitch within a predetermined amount of time after receiving the ball 60 when no runners are on base. A possible amount of time is 15 seconds. The instant invention also optionally provides for a penalty to be issued when the pitcher fails to deliver a pitch within a predetermined amount of time after receiving the ball 60 when there are runners on base. A possible amount of time is 20 seconds. A possible penalty is to issue a ball to the batter. Other possible penalties include issuing a walk to the batter, a warning to the pitcher, a suspension of the pitcher from playing for a defined period during the game, or an ejection of the pitcher from the game. In another embodiment of the present invention, the batter is encouraged not to delay and to enter the batter's box 30 quickly, or to stay in the batter's box 30 between pitches. A penalty may be issued to the batter when the batter fails to keep at least one foot in the batter's box 30 after each pitch when no runners are on base, or when the batter fails to return to the batter's box 30 after each pitch within a reasonable time when there are runners on base. A possible penalty is to issue a strike to the batter. Other possible penalties include issuing a warning to the batter, issuing an out to the batter, suspending the batter from playing for a defined period during the game, or ejecting the batter from the game. The umpire may be given discretion as to what amount of time is reasonable for the batter to return to the batter's box 30. These rules can speed up the pace of the game without disrupting the flow of the game, and thus help to keep the attention of the players and spectators.

Time of Play

[67] In another embodiment of the present invention, rules are provided wherein the game ends after a predetermined number of innings that is less than nine innings; after a predetermined length of time; or after the completion of the maximum number

of innings within a predetermined length of time. One possible embodiment of these rules is that the game ends after seven innings or after the completion of the maximum number of innings within 75 minutes, whichever occurs first.

Players

[68] Embodiments of the present invention provide for nine defensive players on the playing field 10 as per regulation baseball rules. Rules of the instant game permit the players of the defensive team on the playing field 10 to be substituted without limitation.

[69] Another embodiment of the present invention provides that each team must have at least 10 players in their batting lineup. In addition, each team in the offensive position may designate an A/B batting position.

Divisions

[70] Another embodiment of the present invention provides that the games may be organized into different divisions according to a particular characteristic of the game or of the players. In this embodiment, each team of players is designated in a division. The teams of players designated in a division will usually play against other teams of players within that division. The divisions may be formed according to velocity of pitching, age of players, and/or gender of players. This is advantageous in keeping the game suitable to the specific skill level of the players in the division. A possible organization of the divisions is as follows: Division 1 for pitching fastballs at speeds of up to 49 miles per hour; Division 2 for pitching fastballs at speeds between 50 and 59 miles per hour; Division 3 for pitching fastballs at speeds between 60 and 69 miles per hour; Division 4 for pitching fastballs at speeds between 70 and 79 miles per hour; and Division 5 for pitching fastballs at speeds of unlimited velocity. These figures may be adjusted so that different ranges in pitching velocity may be designated for different divisions. The pitching velocity is optionally determined by velocity sensors. The velocity sensors are optionally glove radar velocity sensors. It is also possible to have the umpire determine whether the pitching velocity is within the range of pitching velocity for the division based on his/her judgment. Pitchers are encouraged to deliver pitches within the velocity range assigned to their division. In specific embodiments of the present invention, rules are provided to issue a penalty

to the pitcher when the pitcher delivers a pitch that is outside the range of pitching velocity for the division. A possible penalty is to issue a ball to the batter. Other penalties include issuing a walk to the batter, a warning to the pitcher, a suspension of the pitcher from playing for a period of time during the game, or an ejection of the pitcher from the game. In other embodiments of the present invention, rules are provided where a penalty issued to the pitcher when pitches are delivered outside the range of pitching velocity for the division on a plurality of occasions throughout the game. A possible number of such occasions is three. A possible penalty is to eject the pitcher from the game. Other possible penalties include issuing a warning to the pitcher, a suspension of the pitcher from playing for a period of time during the game, or awarding an automatic walk or run for the other team.

League

[71] In another embodiment of the present invention, a league is organized from a plurality of divisions formed from a plurality of teams, using the rules of play of the present invention comprising limiting the pitcher to delivering only fastball pitches. The divisions are organized according to velocity of pitching, age of players, and/or gender of players as discussed above.

Runs

[72] In a further embodiment of the present invention, a rule is provided that adds an extra measure of excitement to the instant game. If a point in the game is reached at which there are two outs and no runners on base, every subsequent run that is scored by the offensive team at bat will count as two runs until the end of that inning. Thus the significance of scoring a run after there are two outs and no runners on base provides an incentive for the players to try harder. The ability to have each such subsequent run count as two runs provides an opportunity for the scores to change faster and possibly allow a losing team to catch up faster.

Tagging

[73] Further embodiments of the present invention allow for non-tagging fielding plays, wherein tagging on fielding plays by fielders is optional. If a defensive player on the playing field 10 receives the ball 60 and touches the base that the runner is advancing to before the runner reaches it, the runner is then called out without the

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need to be tagged. These rules are advantageous in that they reduce the chance of collision between players and thus add an extra measure of safety to the game as compared to regulation baseball.

Base Running

[74] Further embodiments of the present invention provide for base stealing by runners. In one embodiment of the rules, base stealing is only allowed after the pitcher releases the ball 60 when making a pitch. Another embodiment of the rules is to allow base stealing only after the ball 60 pitched by the pitcher crosses home plate 22. In other embodiments of the rules, base stealing is not allowed.

[75] In still further embodiments of the present invention, leading by runners in upper divisions of play is allowed, and in lower divisions of play, leading by runners is not allowed.

Playing Field

[76] The game of the present invention provides the use of a playing field 10 with a first base 12, second base 18, third base 20, home plate 22, center field 56, left field 54, and right field 58, arranged in a diamond-shaped formation. A pitching distance from the mound 40 and the home plate 22 is provided of between 45 and 60 feet, with a possible pitching distance of 55 feet. In addition, a base path distance is provided of between 60 and 75 feet. The pitching distance and base path distance may each be varied depending on the division, age and ability of the players. The instant game also provides a playing field 10 with a fence distance from the outfield fence 50 and the home plate 22 of between 200 and 300 feet. The fence distance will depend on the division, age and ability of the players, and the facilities that are available.

[77] The instant game provides for the use of a safety first base 12 that includes a first part 14 that is placed within fair territory and a second part 16 that is placed within foul territory and which is attached to and directly adjacent to the first part 14. The first part 14 is used for the first baseman to field throws and for runners who have successfully reached first base 12 and are advancing towards second base 18. The second part 16 is used for runners who have batted a fair ball and are advancing towards first base 12. The safety first base 12 is intended to help prevent collisions

between a runner advancing towards first base 12 and the first baseman, and thus add an extra measure of safety to the game.

Equipment

[78] Embodiments of the present invention provide for the use of a ball 60 that is between 9 inches and 10 inches in circumference with a softer core than that of regulation baseball balls. The ball 60 is preferably a reduced injury factor ball. The ball 60 is optionally manufactured by Rawlings™. Further, the ball 60 is optionally a Level 10 Reduced Injury Factor ball manufactured by Rawlings™. Also provided are the use of bats made of wood or composite wood particles. Aluminum bats are not allowed to be used. Further, the instant game prohibits the use of metal spikes. The use of the said equipment and rules described herein are intended to provide protection to the players and help prevent serious injury from the ball 60 or from collisions between players, and thus add an extra measure of safety to the game.

[79] Also provided are the use of velocity sensors. The velocity sensors are optionally glove radar velocity sensors that may be attached to the glove of the catcher catching the pitch from the pitcher in order to measure the pitching velocity of the pitches.

Scope of the Invention

[80] The present invention has been described in an illustrative manner. It is to be understood that the terminology which has been used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation.

[81] Although various examples of combined elements of the invention have been described, it will also be understood that these are not intended to be exhaustive and features of one embodiment may be combined with those of another, and such other combinations are contemplated to be within the scope of the invention disclosed herein.

[82] Many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above description that are readily apparent to one of skill in the art, and all such variations are intended to be encompassed by the present invention. Therefore, within the scope of the appended claims, the present invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.